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Studio One

2016

Volume 41

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From the Editors

Studio One is a literary and visual arts magazine published each spring by the College of St. Benedict/St. John's University. Its mission is to give new and/or established writers a forum in which to present their works. The magazine's focus is poetry, short fiction, essays, and all forms of reproducible visual art works. Submissions are open to all students on either St. John's or St. Benedict's campuses and to the general public regardless of regional, national, or international location.

In 1976, a student named Clare Rossini had the foresight to create a new magazine for publishing the artistic works of authors and artists living in the surrounding area. As Rossini wrote, "Art is the life current of the community. It is a source of pleasure and pride for us; it unites us with our human predecessors and successors. Art is no luxury; it is a vital human activity. By publishing *Studio One*, we wish to support the members of our Minnesota community dedicated to that activity and to make their art available to those for whom it was made." While *Studio One's* reach has extended greatly since its founding in 1976, the current Editors-in-Chief have striven to publish a selection that still supports the mission written by Clare more than 40 years ago. Without Clare's efforts, we would not be presenting the 2016 edition of *Studio One*.

Studio One would also like to give thanks to our staff advisors, Matt Callahan and Rachel Marston, along with all the faculty of the CSB/SJU English Departments, Mark Conway of the Literary Arts Institute, Greg Harren and Sentinel Printing, all our contributors, and all those who submitted their work.

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Creation

No matter whether created or evolved,
as specks of being lost in time and space,
or figments or recipients of the universal mind,
we were born to a world of demands, stress and sorrow,
but allowances were allowed if days became too long with worry.

No matter whether created or evolved,
we were made, and always meant, to spend
long hours under shade trees with a hot sun overhead,
instincts telling us about the cooling effects of evaporation,
plant mechanics changing our carbon dioxide into fresh oxygen,
as the leaves did their magic flutter between the sun and our fragile skin.

No matter whether created or evolved,
we were programmed for countless hours
on a cool night under the endless star blanket,
letting the muse and mystery surround and enter us,
with our hearts all beating the same slow rhythm of life,
until we all felt the same blood deep and vital under our skin.

No matter whether created or evolved,
we were imprinted with the longing for love;
loneliness was not a companion when dark descended,
and nights shared with another became less long and fearful.
A body in a room desired to be more than just one against the struggle,
and two minds working together could discover answers closer than the stars.

-Dennis Herrell
Huston, TX



Watercolor

Alexis Jungles

College of St. Benedict '18

Pathology

Some men are born to cry uncle
with the hands of fathers, mouths of mothers.
Mine has worn the same thing for years:
a wet apron strung with mirrors

tied around his waist with sweet potato vine
which he tied to my waist as well.
He fingers the vine daily, a rosary he made
himself, a green badge of loneliness.

I learned early on that it takes a tornado, to get him
to stand still long enough, to hear me.
I must uproot the trees, each and every time,
that have grown back in his ears.

It takes the likes of Job to wait for tornadoes.
It takes hard work to uproot trees. More than once,
I've planted whispers in the holes they left, hoping.
They didn't grow away; they blossomed shade.

I chose my words like a borrowed child
would, until they were hoarse and dry
so they might blend into the sound of cattle
grazing, catfish frying, into something familiar.

He would not let me be quiet and alone. Like him,
I lived in the kitchen. Among skillets
as wide as hours. Among jars of bacon grease
slowly milking themselves into separate halves.

But it is his kitchen. It is his house. And he's
hung mountains on the walls. And the little sun
that snakes through each morning is quickly wound
with sweet potato vine into another knot.

The sun sliver then sets behind the steeple
across the road of the church he built with
the preacher who on more than one occasion
has come by for scraps, his hands for plates.

Yet, this plain and simple house is also mine
because he fed me the pain of the land, the brick,
the haul of the crop, the leftovers, so often
that the spoon rarely left my mouth.

So, I choked. So, I left him. I left him
while he slept in the valley of his kingdom.
I walked away, a timid young man not
realizing his legs could run.

I got as far as the gate when it happened.
He woke immediately. The draft from the open
screen door caught its tail in the mesh; it cried out.
His gardened face dug up from a deep sleep.

He leaned against one of his mountains, staring,
while he grabbed the vine and gave it a pull.
I went back up the knotted, gravel drive,
my face clearly visible in his apron.

-T.K. Lee
Starkville, MS

Flinging From the Pods of the Soul

-Maxine Kumin: Cento

How can you know I traveled here?
I am putting a dream in your head
A tongue of water
You, my gardener
I come calling with a carrot.

From some uncertain place
Breaking through gauze and violet gels
In which I sang, "Abide With Me."
I spoke to Him to save my soul.
Even the dead at sea have a special path to His bosom.

And he takes us all inside.
Here is a field that never lies fallow.
At night we will set our poems.
Another chapter
That engrosses them is February.

The morning I leave
I am going backward in a home movie.
This is the life I came with
Body, Old Paint, Old Partner—
A flinging from the pods of the soul.

Is that who I was?
The air rings like a bell
Called Mercy. He is calling His children in
And this is the celestial arrangement.
And we will live all in bliss.

O heart, we are
Angels from streets of gold.
Dear friend, last night I dreamed
Of this dream.
Calling to me and me crossing over.

Collection: Our Ground Time Here Will Be Brief

-Kathleen Gunton
Orange, CA

Crying Advice

Crying in heavy traffic is an efficient use of gridlock. Just remember not to look at other drivers—they'll worry you'll wreck.

Bawling on your back becomes pleasant when your ears fill with tears. The television sounds like it's under a grey ocean.

Avoid weeping along to pop songs. It feels like a teenager playing doctor pulls your internal organs out your throat.

When you weep, imagine Grief as a mute giant, your body limp in his gargantuan hand. Let him make your spine a rosary, his fingers working every vertebrae.

It won't make you Catholic, or holy, but it becomes necessary—unless you wish to be crushed—to give yourself over to something so enormous, so silent.

-W. Vandoren Wheeler
Portland, OR



Charcoal Cat
Alexandra Rudelius
College of St. Benedict '17

Bright Eye

A Bright Eye in the eastern sky
suspended in a nightly wink
changed the course of restless kings
by staying open, refusing to blink,
until they found the scene they sought
and craved. They'd left behind their things
and traveled light, in the cold and dark.
It showed which way to go and which way, not.

These stars leave me unsatisfied:
I keep on scanning for a spark
of such a brighter quality
to serve as beacon, flare, and guide
beyond the sequined galaxy.
You note the glimmers in my eyes:
They're only mirrors of the sky's
which gather dust and blink and wink
to be rinsed like suds in a vast black sink
but cannot take me anywhere
I crave to go—although I think
I'm happy, still and all, that they are there.

-James B. Nicola
New York, NY



Untitled
Larry Schug
Avon, MN

Ides

I miss the ides monthly,
giving them no thought,
each morning its own portent.
A bright light glares
ominously above red wet eyes
and cheeks in day-old shadow.
Something peers out
from darkness, followed
me from a dream to lurks
just behind me, waiting
to leap out. No mind,
I forget to pay attention
and step right by
into another mediocre day.

-Richard Dinges, Jr.
Walton, NE

Definition of Blank at the Teller's Window

Surrender him
the bag of sugar,
a rhubarb stalk,
the sour that adheres
like silver to the plate
of an erratic mind, sweet
that empowers him to dream
and count up
forty years on the wind
of lilacs,
his mother's voice
calling him in.

-Al Rocheleau
Orlando, FL

My Mother as Lawrence of Arabia

Her eyes were as blue as Peter O'Toole's—
without eyeliner.

She traveled to exotic spots. Sand, sand,
sand—she crossed deserts.

She loved men in uniform, hated
how the war betrayed them.

She had impressive credits and a long
intermission.

She was tough, she was brave, she
was crazy.

She was vastly beautiful. She
was vast.

She lived for a cause but didn't
believe in anything—

though she thought Omar Sharif
was to die for.

Sand, sand, sand—she had
a thirst.

-Meredith Davies Hadaway
Chestertown, MD

Seasons Lost

The Seasons came and passed again
Since last I heard your voice;
Many are the ways I'd change
If death but gave a choice.

I'd pick you flowers in the Spring
To show you that I care
And when you needed comforting
You'd always find me there.

The Summer breeze against my cheek
Like memories of your touch
The love we take for granted
Is the one we miss so much

Sunlight on Autumn leaves,
Reflections of your hair;
Youth and beauty paid the price—
God often takes the fair.

Winter winds that chill the heart
And etch your stone with frost,
Whisper of eternal love
Beyond the years we lost.

-C. David Hay
Terre Haute, IN



Howth Peninsula
Emily Schoenbeck
College of St. Benedict's '16

My Mother in Sepia

She wears the perfect pearls and cashmere
sweater of a schoolgirl posing at sixteen.

A cloud of russet hair surrounding forehead,
eyes just lifted from a leather book.

Each edge emerges softly from its brown
cocoon to flutter toward adulthood.

Those were the sepia years before the war
turned everything to black and white—

the beau whose bones would bleach by
the side of a road in the Philippines;

her father, who would disappear into a dark
mountain, the crash site marked by a small

white cross. Now my mother's edges
blur again, her eyes no longer see to read,

gray shadows where the letters used to be.
She never talks about the war—all the loss

has softened like a steady rain, a day that will not
brighten. Beside her sits the sepia photo in its frame.

What do you miss the most? I ask her, looking
at the curving lip and glowing cheek.

Books, she says, I miss the books.

-Meredith Davies Hadaway
Chestertown, MD

Divorce

Silence. A frigid eve,
a winding road devoid of cars.

Silence. My father steers
our rust-spot laden station wagon
filled with putrid hockey gear,
breath frozen 'round his face.

Silence. Not long before,
he blew the whistle, shrill staccato stopping play.
Voice grinding like a cutting saw,
stick pointing like a conductor's wand,
he'd shown us skaters where to pass.

Silence. Now in his seat,
his whistle stowed, his thundering call
lay dormant, a bear retreated to its den.

Silence. Dad eyes the snow,
a detective seeking hints of road.
Then slowing, he turns; we stop.

Silence. Inside the car,
the whooshing, whirring heater breathes,
the engine trembles beneath hood's frost.
No words yet this eve.

Silence. Night approaches
as sun vacates the December dusk.
Dad leans against his vinyl seat,
tears glistening off his sunken cheeks.

Silence. My pulse starts throbbing,
my teenage heart a churning train.
I stare ahead, unsettled,
afraid to whisper, “What is wrong?”

Silence. A secret sobbing
fills our silver Chevrolet.
Dad’s anguished voice, like a wounded moose:
“Mom’s not coming home.”

Silence. Stunned I sit,
mouth now dry like winter air.
Draped upon the steering wheel,
my crumpled father heaves and heaves.

Silence. Just the trees,
tall white pines with pillow cones
festooned with the Christmas snow,
hear the silence crush my Dad.

-David Laliberte
St. Cloud, MN

Tequila

Single life is-tequila with lime,

shots of travelers, jacks, diamonds, and then spades,

holding back aces-

mocking jokers

paraplegic aged tumblers of the night trip.

Poltergeist define as another frame,

a dancer in the corner shadows.

Single lady don't eat the worm...

beneath the belt, bashful, very loud, yet unspoken.

Your man lacks verb, a traitor to your skin.

-Michael Lee Johnson
Itasca, IL

Not Paying Attention

My wife of thirty-four years
is upstairs in her studio
favoring the left knee
or is it her right?

She is inspired
by Monet, I think
but it may be Manet.
Impressionism, perhaps
or is it Realism?

It's something about
still light
hard air
dull color
the ache when
an artist remembers
the day-to-day.

This morning
she kissed me
and, waking, I
noticed that her eyes
were, in fact,
brown
though I kept
this knowledge
to myself.

-Marc Berman
Florence, MA

Sail

In Maine I built a small model
of the San Francisco Bay
so I could sail
my little boat there

without crossing the desert
or going around Africa
This was cheating
but to breathe is to cheat

You did not make the air
I was too big to fit
in the little boat so I made
a model of myself to sail it

which I guess was also against
the rules
but when I'm anchored
near the Bridge and fog rolls in

the world shrinks
and I do what must be done
In tsunamis predictions of scale
have little meaning

-David Rogers
Cave City, KY



Costa Rican Turtle
Alexus Jungles
College of St. Benedict '18

Apology (Drafts)

APOLOGY, DRAFT #1

I apologize. The poisoned seeds I spread
across your lawn were supposed
to spell out, in dead sparrows:

MY HURT GROWS

At least the mess
is expressive, yes?

I planned to fling a Molotov Cocktail
made of your forgotten “panties” stuffed
down the mouth of a bottle
of our favorite tequila, then fling it
at the Mexican embassy in protest
for our now worthless honeymoon,

but I, as you well know, am a coward.

Instead, I walked through the two-story house
our imaginations sketched together, slogging
a gallon of gasoline behind me. I flicked
one of your disgusting cigarettes at it.

APOLOGY, DRAFT #2

I regret that I broke
into your apartment
to leave plans, apparently
scratched out by your cats,
to disfigure you in your sleep.

But the expense
of creating a fake newspaper
with an obituary of my suicide
(noting an undisclosed
woman's name carved
into my chest)
was worth it.

APOLOGY, DRAFT #3

Your heart
is a cunt.

APOLOGY, DRAFT #4

I am ashamed of the erection
that distracted me as I knelt
on your sidewalk to draw
those chalk outlines
in sexual positions.

I felt ready to move on when
I sent you that skin magazine
with my photo pasted
over all the male faces.

APOLOGY, DRAFT #5

The mornings I put on my wedding ring,
I pretended it was you I was entering.

Our children, unborn ghosts
bearing features from each of us—
they refused to stop following me.

I couldn't keep from seeing them
as I walked, swallowing sobs,
across the parking lot.

I held their heads
down in a bathtub
filled with nothing
until they finally
stopped kicking.

APOLOGY, DRAFT #8

Yup, I hand-painted
your blue azaleas black.

APOLOGY, DRAFT #9

I owe you one
champagne glass.

I am sorry I can still feel
its wispy stem,
feel the way my fingernail
fits into the etched curve
of the J of your name.
Those pretentious cups

of specked light we raised
to each other's lips just
as that ripe sunset wiped
blood oranges and pomegranate
across the sky the day we married...

Did you know if you
smash two glasses together,
only one will shatter?

-W. Vandoren Wheeler
Portland, OR



Untitled
Lary Schug
Avon, MN

Jig Saw Puzzle

they'll converse
the whole rainy
day surface,
finger
questions through
emotional hues,
pick
and press
snug fits
against each
regret. By sun
set, they'll trust
every edge of silence
and complete
the infinite-pieced
image propped
up on their
heart's box top.

-Murray McCarten
Richfield, MN

Deconstruction

This is me, after hours
of unsatisfactory discourse,
of philosophy and laundry lists,
attempting to explain it all
in a poem.

This is me standing in front of the house.
I am looking at that corner
of roof-trim that needs fixing—
such an old house, and poor carpenter.

This is a photograph of both us out there,
taken by Julie who wanted to use up her film.
She will find it years from now,
and affix it to a nondescript album
(the kind that are stacked
and adorned with printed flowers).

This is me cut out of stiff tan paper,
overlaid with a red square and two
brown rectangles, black ovals for shoes;
I'm pressed into blue background
with a stapled green band at the bottom,
and the brown house is a square, the
black roof triangle, white curlicue
for smoke, red chimney. There is paste
seeping through the edges. That sweet paste.

This is me an open oval
on loose-leaf.
Eyes, no mouth.

This is a smear of carrots
on the wall. It is also me.

This is a cry, an attempt
to communicate.

This is me.
Where are you?

This
is me.

-Al Rocheleau
Orlando, FL

Once I Transcended Time

-Theodore Roethke: Cento

Once I transcended time
The sudden light spilled on the floor like cream.
Indeed, I saw a shimmering lake
Between cliffs of light.
One toe in eternity,
The sweet light met me as I walked toward
That day we took from the angels.
It is neither spring nor summer; it is Always.
Waiting. The quiet of old wood or stone without water
Such stretchings of the spirit make no sound.
We end in joy!
For Love, for Love's sake.

Collection: The Collected Poems Of Theodore Roethke

-Kathleen Gunton
Orange, CA



Self-Discovery

Andy Poster

St. John's University '16

MiG

Mompati the car salesman in Gaborone, Botswana, says, “You Baas, you needs a bakkie”.

It is inevitability we’re contemplating here – no “ifs” – a cosmic balancing act.

A bakkie is a pickup truck in Southern Africa.

It is so hot in the garage it seems the Sun’s landed close by, somewhere behind the hill.

Mompati says I must get a bakkie “to send out the right signal”.

- And what signal is that?

- To tell the world you’re a Man.

- How so?

- Because if you drives a bakkie you’re saying, “Got a farm, and got cattle”. With cattle you can pay for a good wife, so you’re a Man.

- Well, I’d still like a small car.

Oh-oh, the sale’s becoming now a slope slippery as a live carp, wiggling bright & wet in the Sun.

- But Baas, then you’re telling everyone that you’re confused!

Ha! A padre he’s now, clasping hands, trying to save me from meself: I must inhabit the Ford bakkie he is patting like a bull.

“Where I come from”, I say, “Highways have milelong straight sections for MiG jetfighters to take off and land”.

Mompati takes it in and, impressed, lets go a bit.

- Yours no trite land, Baas.

Daniel Aristi
Geneva, Switzerland

A Modest Proposal For Satisfying Primal Hunger in the United States

An issue of alarming nature in the United States has finally achieved a level of prominence that would make it criminal to ignore. Male members of the U.S. population continue to be underserved in regards to their emotional and physical development, and this continued ignorance of an entire half our population has negative ramifications that threaten to affect our society as a whole. With this affliction striking at roughly one eighth of the population, the possibility that we as a country could continue to go about life as usual would be laughable, if it were not very much the reality. The solution I have reached, as I feel anyone who closely examined the problem would, is that we must utilize our primary resource and legalize the consumption of human flesh and other such viable parts of the human body.

At first glance, I admit this proposal appears shocking, perhaps even troubling, to some individuals, but the benefits alone of legalizing cannibalism should put many of its would-be-opponents at ease. I need not remind you of the point supported by nearly indisputable antidotal evidence: men are voracious eaters. Cannibalism simply allows for those who are hungry to take care of themselves. Its time the laws of the United States adequately addressed the needs of men. Flesh consumption also aids some of the most vulnerable of our society: the multitude of “nice guys” who find themselves inexplicably unable to acquire the satisfaction they require. This policy would finally allow their results to match their efforts, real or perceived. It would finally offer men the opportunity to feel fully secure in themselves and their abilities, a pressing concern in our present day society.

Like any proposal, especially the most visionary, there will be those who voice concerns, as they should. Allow me to address some of the issues that will of course be the most pressing, such as, who is eligible for consumption. Now there are those who will flippantly respond, “anyone who can be eaten”, but I believe this is to deal unfairly with what is a very fair question. Others will respond with, “The weaker are easier to

pick off. They're meant to be eaten.”, a beautiful example of Darwinian logic and worth considering. The truth is, however, that we already have a means in place for identifying the “consumables”.

We are a society based on visual cues. You need only look around your average shopping mall, bar, or school to witness people advertising their flesh. When people wear clothing that reveals more skin and opens their bodies up to the admiration of the general public, they are, in truth, attempting to signal people their bodies are prime pickings. The legalization of consuming flesh would simply be acknowledging what most of us have long known to be true: they are asking to be eaten.

Similar to smoking and other vices, society would also no doubt limit this kind of indulgence. By self-regulating this behavior to certain establishments, bars would likely become one such feasting friendly place, those who wish to avoid being eaten need only avoid places where the activity is common. If they choose to continue to visit such places for their enjoyment, they must also assume the risk. Let's also not forget those who are being consumed always have the option of telling their consumers “no”. They must realize that hungry people are going to assume their satisfaction is adequate justification unless they are told otherwise. It's simply a matter of common sense and courtesy.

As a catch-all to any minor remaining concerns, it must go without saying that not all men who are hungry will choose cannibalism. Those who insist this does not matter insist on blowing the possible negative effects out of proportion. Focusing on the cannibalistic downplays how many men choose not to engage in it. It creates the illusion of a problem more widespread than it is, and suggests that, just because people are not currently being consumed, potential consumption could in some way disrupt their lives. They are nothing more than an overzealous minority yelling at shadows.

It's time we all looked at the world as it is and dealt honestly with the issue. Those suffering for reasons beyond their control must be heard and met with compassion. It's time we stopped ignoring the cannibals among us. Having outlined the natural tendencies that make such a law viable, expounded on the clear benefits to all those involved, and ade-

quately addressed the concerns the more sensitive members of our society feel, any reader must see the logic of such cannibalism. It is my firm belief that this proposal will be met with all the furor it deserves.

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Emily Schoenbeck
College of St. Benedict '16

The Wagner-Berger Prize for Excellence in Creative Writing

In 1987, Patricia and Leonard Porcello endowed this prize to honor Patricia's parents, Louis and Mary Wagner-Berger, and to support college women who are interested in writing short stories and novels. It is designed to encourage and reward excellence in creative writing at the College of St. Benedict.

The Wagner-Berger Prize for fiction is the first scholarship of its kind at the College of St. Benedict. It is a scholarship awarded annually to the CSB student who submits the most original, previously unpublished short story. All submissions are judged by a committee of English Department members, and the winner receives an award of \$1,000. Studio One is honored to publish this year's winner, CSB senior Leanne Otto.

Moonlight Sonata

Vera Westing awakes to the sound of glass shattering. She jolts upright in her bed. She thinks it is a dream until she hears the click of a lock being turned.

Her palms are cold. And wet.

She hears another pane of glass crash to the floor in probably a million pieces. Then the old creak of a door being opened.

Panic sets in.

She isn't expecting anyone. That's for certain.

Vera laughs at the thought of Henry's kids showing up in the middle of the night. The last time she saw either Oliver or Violet was at the reading of the will. They were two self-entitled brats that only showed up when they needed their father's money. They also hated her. Couldn't see what Henry saw in her. Vera even had to admit that there was nothing exceptional about her. She was forty when they married and had not once, ever been called beautiful. Although Henry had been estranged from his children for years, it still came as a complete surprise to everyone when Vera inherited everything. Completely blindsided, Violet had cried. Oliver threatened to sue her for defamation of character. Vera had laughed at that one. Dryly.

But they wouldn't go to such lengths to get in—especially Violet. She always had her beady little eyes on that stained glass anyway. Henry wanted to get rid of it as soon as he heard Violet's claims upon it but Vera had coaxed him out of it. His grandfather had imported it from Lancashire.

So it's a burglar. Fantastic.

Vera wonders what kind of burglar he is. Is he a good kid just down on his luck, is he in it for the thrill, or is his intent purely malicious? But none of it matters because she's still an old lady trapped in her bed. She hears him move through the glass, crunching it with his shoes. Vera wonders if it is sexist of her to assume that the burglar is male. But as

she listens to the heavy, thudding footsteps on the marble floor, it is decidedly male.

She hears him in the foyer now. She can tell because she hears him run into that stupid fern—the one that Henry had insisted on placing in the middle of the floor. Shows character, he always said. Rubbish. When she was still mobile, she would always stub her toe on that stone pot. And the damned thing had grown so tall that she could barely see the stairs behind it. But for all the griping she did to Henry, she couldn't bear to throw it out when he died. She hopes the burglar knocks it over.

The clock chimes the hour. Vera counts four. Such an odd time to be burglarizing, she thinks. Close to dawn. Someone might see. But then she remembers that she lives by herself in a large house atop a hill. Maybe being caught doesn't bother him. Vera loses track of the burglar. She shifts around in her bed and strains her neck to listen. The nurse was supposed to leave the door open.

She finally hears him from below. His heavy footsteps seem to echo from every room in the house. She hears the sound of more broken glass and decides that he must have some kind of tool with him. What do they carry? Lead pipes. No, that's from a board game. Crowbar, that's the word. Those daily crosswords are finally paying off.

She concentrates hard on the sound of objects thudding on the floor. It sounds different than the foyer. Almost muted. Like carpet. Vera shakes her head. Rug. Books are being pulled off the shelves. The study. Well he won't find anything there. Henry kept nothing of importance there. More crashes follow. She hopes he breaks that cheap vase Violet sent for her birthday. She hears papers being shuffled around and ripped. Vera guesses the burglar's moved onto Henry's desk. There might even be that bottle of scotch still tucked in one of the drawers.

Scotch. It's a gentleman's drink. Vera remembers buying it for Henry on their last anniversary together. Perfectly aged. Henry drank a glass every day. Said it tasted like a fine summer's evening. Vera thought it tasted like leather. She wonders if the burglar has found it yet. Every man ought to be a scotch drinker.

The noises cease and she follows the thudding a short distance from the study. Vera knows exactly where he's going. The parlor. She's counted the steps it takes to get there from the study. Fourteen. Henry needed it when he started losing his vision. He had refused assistance from a cane so his movements were often clumsy. More than once he had broken a lamp or two on the way there. Henry wanted to be able to walk to the room to listen as she played the piano. For the first time, Vera realizes that she cares about what the burglar does in this room. She imagines what he's seeing. The heavy velvet drapes drawn in every window save for one. The moonlight coming through the only uncovered window, streaming onto the beautiful, mahogany grand piano. Henry bought it for her as a wedding gift. It was made from the best quality woods—hard rock maple, sugar pine, and beech. It was a Steinway. Much more expensive than the cufflinks she'd bought him. Yet he loved them as much as she did the piano.

Vera refuses to think of herself as exceptional, but even she can't deny her talent as a pianist. She took it up at a young age, for she was always such a sickly child. She battled scarlet fever, pneumonia, and mumps before she turned six. Vera's mother used to say that she was made of glass. So she was never allowed to step foot outside, play with other children, or even attend school. Her mother bought her a piano to keep her entertained and it became her only friend. Although she was a poor student, she was very proficient at playing the piano. Her French tutor used to wish that she would put as much dedication into conjugating *être* verbs as she did in playing ninth chords. But it was her flawless rendition of Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata that first caught Henry's attention. She had been playing at the Westchester Country Club for twenty years before she ever met him.

Vera sighs. It's been such a lonely, miserable, five years without her dear Henry. She hasn't played since his passing. She likes to tell herself that it has to do with the arthritis—she really does have it—but that's not what keeps her. If she really wanted to she could start right where

she left off. Her memory may be a little dodgy when it comes to remembering things like names or addresses, but not the piano. Simply laying her hands down on the keys would be enough to get her started. She used to play with such precision and purpose. Her long fingers moved so fluidly and effortlessly that they looked like moving art. But most of all, she remembers how in that one moment, she felt like the most beautiful woman in the world.

Vera remembers the first time she ever laid eyes on Henry. She was sitting alone at a table waiting to play when a man came in. He was wearing a gray silk suit with a yellow pocket square. He had tousled salt and pepper hair and was still quite handsome for a man his age. Vera was wearing her plaid wool jacket with matching skirt. She had tried to be daring that night by wearing bright red lipstick but after looking at the man she realized how ridiculous she looked. She removed the lipstick with her napkin. It was only after in the ladies room that Vera noticed she had smeared lipstick across her face.

That's how they met. She had been so embarrassed about the lipstick that she ran from the bathroom and accidentally knocked into the good-looking man. She had apologized profusely but he slowed her down enough to introduce himself. Then something amazing happened. He asked her out to dinner. On their first date, she set the sleeve of her velvet dress on fire and had to put it out in her split pea soup. Then she crushed his toes with her heel during a Viennese waltz. Vera called it a disaster but Henry said it was love at first sight. Vera still believes it was her rendition of Moonlight Sonata that made Henry fall for her. They married within the month. It was her first marriage and Henry's second. His two children only grudgingly attended their nuptials. Violet had refused to be her maid-of-honor. Oliver called her a witch on the day of the wedding. Still, despite these two terrors, Vera and Henry were together for over thirty years.

Vera dabs at her eyes with one of Henry's handkerchiefs. Then she hears Clair de Lune, being played very softly, from below. The bur-

glar. He plays well, she muses. She closes her eyes and finds that even her old ears can't detect a mistake. Debussy's not too easy either. He's not for any beginner, that's for certain. She laughs quietly. A pianist turned burglar. What are the odds? Vera now listens more intently. She hopes that he will indulge her with another song. After that, he can continue to rob her blind. She feels her heart racing, anxious to hear something else. Mozart. Brahms. Liszt. Anything. Instead, she hears him play a round of scales. Then another. He plays a third. For some reason, this makes Vera smile. Even though the saying is old, she's happy it still applies. She and this burglar just might have something in common after all.

He stops midway through his fourth round of scales and Vera hears the unmistakable cracking of knuckles. Again, she smiles. That sound is familiar to her. Vera's mother used to hate it when she cracked her knuckles. Said she'd get crooked fingers and big knuckles. But she liked to crack them right before she played a really difficult song. She thought it made her look like she was up to the challenge and somehow, it made her play better. She holds out the wrinkly, liver-spotted hands and inspects the long, slightly arthritic fingers. Well, she has the crooked fingers all right but her knuckles didn't look like they'd increased in size. She turns her ring on her third finger around. What used to fit so perfectly now seem two sizes too large.

Her attention returns when she hears the opening notes of a very familiar song. Vera gasps when the burglar plays the haunting first movement of Moonlight Sonata. She struggles to sit up in her bed, but manages to get her back as straight as she can. She closes her eyes holds out her hands and puts them into position. Her fingers press down on nothing but it doesn't matter. She's playing now, keeping perfectly in time with him. Oh how wonderful the feeling is. It's as if she's never stopped playing. She finishes the first movement and transitions into the second movement flawlessly. And suddenly she's back at Westchester Country Club. She's in the dining hall, playing on their piano, but it's not as good as her Steinway. She can feel Henry's hand on her shoulder, the warmth of it coursing through her body. She can feel his approval, his admiration, and his love for her. Vera finishes the second movement with ease

and enters into the more difficult third movement. It is filled with fast arpeggios and strongly accented notes. It requires not only skillful but lively playing as well. It's just as brutal as she remembers it. Vera loves it. She feels the challenge in the form of stiff and sore fingers but fights through it, determined to finish. She feels it nearing its end, but it's still just as raw and powerful as it was when it first began. Her heart is beating just as fast as the notes are being played and Vera is in rapture. She hasn't lost it, not one bit. She's still the most beautiful woman in the world. She finishes the last notes and collapses back against the pillows, trying to catch her breath.

Vera hears the clock chime downstairs. Her eyes open immediately. How long has she been asleep for? Her room is still just as dark as before but it has to be dawn. She looks stupidly at the window before realizing the drapes are closed. Then she remembers the burglar. She listens hard in the direction of the door but hears nothing from downstairs. No more glass breaking, paper rustling, or piano playing. The house is just as quiet as it normally is. She sighs again. Nothing but a dream. It makes sense, an old, lonely woman dreams about playing piano with a burglar. It sounds even more ridiculous now. Vera lies back against the pillows and holds out her hands. They feel sore, almost as if she was really playing after all. But she shakes her head. She's even more senile than she thought she was. She decides to nap until the nurse arrives at eight when she hears scuffling from next door. Mice. Bats. Or cockroaches. Vera settles on mice. The house is old, far older than she, so it doesn't surprise her if the walls are infested with them.

Just as she pulls the covers up to tuck in, she hears the definite sound of a door being shut from next door. The nurse has a key, Vera thinks. She can easily let herself in. She is very upset now. The nurse has specific instructions to ring her before she comes over. The hospital is going to hear about this. The last thing an old woman needs is a scare like this. They're going to have a lot of apologizing to do, that's for certain. Vera is about to call out to her when she sees a white light underneath

her door. It isn't the sun. Vera can't place its source. Then she hears heavy, thudding footsteps in the hallway, right outside her door.

Vera has been waiting for this moment for a long time. She sits up as straight as she can and spreads the bedcovers over her lap. She smooths back her snow-white hair and pinches some color onto her pale cheeks. She tries to wear as dignified a look as possible.

She watches the doorknob jingle slightly, as if he is testing it.

Vera's heartbeat is steady.

The door opens a crack, but it reveals nothing to Vera. His form blends right into the darkness of the hallway.

And then it slowly creaks open, bit-by-bit, until the bright orb of light blinds Vera.

Her eyes adjust.

She smiles.

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Submission Guidelines

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